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# **French Connections: The Networking Strategies of French Highly Skilled Migrants in London**

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## **Abstract:**

Although social networks are often taken for granted in migration studies literature, these social ties are not spontaneous but require effort and nurturing. There has been insufficient research on the actual process of networking, especially among highly skilled migrants. The reasons why and how migrants form networks with particular characteristics are still poorly understood. In this paper we argue that it is necessary not only to consider the structure of networks, but also their content – the nature of the relationships as well as the flow of resources within various social ties.

Drawing on qualitative data from a study of highly skilled French migrants in London's business and financial sector, we use a micro-analysis of network making processes. In the context of London as a dynamic and highly competitive financial centre, we examine the importance of opportunities, skills and shared interests in building new social relationships from scratch. In addition, we also assess how mobility and proximity, virtual communication and co-presence impact on geographically dispersed networks and why some long distance relationships endure while others fade over time.

Bringing together classic literature on professional networking with wider discussions on how relationships are managed across time and space, our work contributes to a fuller understanding of why and how highly skilled migrants form networks with particular characteristics.

**Key words:** networks, friendship, highly skilled migrants, London, France

## **Introduction:**

Migration leads to a re-organisation of social networks (Eve 2010). As well as maintaining links in their country of origin, migrants also form new relationships in the destination country. As Vertovec (2002:3) has argued: 'Migration is a process that both depends on, and creates, social networks'. However, despite the fact that networks have often been taken for granted in migration studies literature, these social ties are not spontaneous but require effort and nurturing (Gurak and Caces 1992). As argued elsewhere (Ryan et al 2008; 2011) there has been insufficient research on the actual process of migrant networking. It is necessary to consider the ways in which socio-economic position may impact on how migrants network (Ryan 2011; Harvey 2011). Focusing on highly skilled French migrants in London, this paper examines how and with whom they construct new networks and what resources are accessed and shared through these various relationships. We draw upon Granovetter and Burt in considering how the flow of information through these ties may facilitate career development in the highly competitive arena of international finance. We also explore the ways in which pre-existing networks may be maintained through time and space.

Migration studies tend to suggest that the initial migratory process may be facilitated by bonding networks, while gradually over time migrants may begin to establish more expansive, bridging links to diverse people (Boyd 1989). As Putnam argues, while inward looking dense bonds are important for getting by, outward looking, bridging connections are necessary for getting ahead (2000: 23). Hence, bridging is often associated with social mobility and integration (Nannestad et al 2008). However, such a sequential model of networking is based on the experiences of economically disadvantaged migrants; the extent to which this model may apply to highly skilled migrants has been questioned (Bagchi 2001). Our research contributes to this discussion by examining how the highly skilled network on several levels simultaneously.

In exploring the process of migrant networking, it is necessary not only to consider the structure of networks, but also their content – the nature of the relationships that exist within different social ties (Podolny and Baron 1997). In this paper, we examine not only the resources that 'inhere in the social structure of relations between and among actors' (Coleman 1988: S98) but also the inter-personal relationships based on mutual support and caring (Wellman 1984). As well as supplying information, advice or practical assistance, work-based networks can also represent sources of friendship, companionship, likeability and identity affirmation (Uzzi 1999; Ibarra and Deshpande 2004). In analysing the process of making new networks, we consider the resources, the inter-personal relationships but also the relative social location of the actors, i.e. the kinds of people with whom migrants form networks (Ryan 2011). Following Eve (2002; 2010), we aim to include a discussion of making new friends within a wider analysis of social networks and so challenge the sharp dichotomy between personal friendships and broader network formation.

We contribute to these discussions through a micro-analysis of network-making (Wittel 2001). We seek to go beyond the simplistic assumptions that highly skilled migrants either do not need to rely on networks, or that they have unlimited possibilities to access a wide array of social ties. We suggest that networking strategies need to be understood in terms of opportunities afforded in different structural contexts, as well as shared interests and socio-cultural skills. Rather than a rigid dichotomy of bridging versus bonding, our approach suggests a continuum of relationships that are spatially and temporally dynamic.

In exploring how and why highly skilled migrants establish and maintain networks with particular characteristics, through inter-personal relationships with different people in different places, we consider how both transient and enduring relationships are negotiated. Examining the temporal and spatial dynamism of networks, this paper assesses how mobility and proximity, virtual communication and co-presence impact on accessing and maintaining different kinds of social ties in different places. We engage with Urry's work on the ways in which new communication technologies mediate and facilitate long distance networking. We expand on this work by drawing on Eve's and Wimmer and Glick Schiller's critique of transnationalism. The possibility of global communication tells us little about how people actually communicate with diverse social ties in different places. We consider why some long distance relationships endure while others fade over time.

In bringing together classic literature on professional (Granovetter; Burt; Uzzi) and friendship (Wellman; Ibarra; Eve) networking with wider discussions on how relationships are managed across time and space (Urry), our work contributes to a fuller understanding of why and how highly skilled migrants form networks with particular characteristics. Specifically, we explore the dynamism of social relationships and the factors that both enable and hinder access to and maintenance of different types of social ties in different places.

### **Understanding social networks**

Network influence in the workplace has been well documented (Podolny and Baron 1997; Uzzi 1999). Social ties can facilitate career mobility within (Burt 1998) and between organisations (Granovetter 1983). Networks channel 'flows of information, resources and sponsorship; regulating influence and reputation; providing socialisation, mentoring and models for constructing identities' (Ibarra and Deshpande 2004: 6).

Considerable attention has been paid to the structure of informal relationships within organisations. Large and expansive networks, in particular, are associated with career progression (Burt 1998: 27). Burt argues that 'cohesive contacts – contacts strongly connected to each other – are likely to have similar information and therefore provide redundant information benefits' (1998: 8). On the other hand, those who can form relations 'between people otherwise disconnected in a social structure' (structural holes) have more opportunities to 'broker the flow of information' (1998: 8). Bridging social ties with a diverse range of people are likely to create 'entrepreneurial opportunity' (1998: 9).

Similarly, Granovetter argues 'bridging weak ties' tend to link very different groups of people (1983: 204). Thus, these ties are 'vital for an individual's integration' into social systems (1983: 203) because an absence of ties can lead to fragmentation as people across a system have no connection with each other. An individual with few weak ties will be deprived of information from distant parts of the social system and 'will be confined to the provincial news and views of their close friends' (1983: 202). This not only insulates them from new information and innovative ideas but also disadvantages them in terms of labour market openings and opportunities.

In the present business environment, especially within the financial sector, worker experience is defined by short term contracts, insecurity and high staff turn-over, which both reflect and reinforce risk, flexibility and perpetual change (Sennett 2006, 1998). Within this

context workers need to be ever mindful of their next career move which is as likely to be between, as within, companies. Webs of sparse contacts with people in related companies can be valuable sources of information about job opportunities. The more contacts one has, with people in positions of knowledge and power, the better one's access to valuable information (Lin et al 1981; Wittel 2001). Sennett (1998) has suggested that this sort of 'short termism' pervades all aspects of relationships including friendship networks, as loyalty and commitment become eroded.

However, it has also been argued that 'network analysts interested in careers often measure and discuss social networks in the same way...primarily as conduits of information and resources exchanged by actors in pursuit of instrumental objectives' (Podolny and Baron 1997: 675). In contrast to such instrumentalism, Podolny and Baron suggest that 'informal ties' in the workplace are also important sources of friendship, support and identity 'often valued for their own sake' (1997: 675). As Ibarra and Deshpande note, within organisations 'people use strong and weak ties' to access different kinds of valuable resources (2004:12). Informal ties at work are not simply sources of career advancement but may also enhance job satisfaction, feelings of belonging, trust and well being in the workplace (Ibarra and Deshpande 2004). Uzzi (1999) argues that work-based networks are most effective when they include a mix of both sparse weak ties, to enable a flow of innovative ideas and information, and strong ties based on loyalty and mutual support. He coins the term 'network complementarity' to describe this mix of weak and strong ties (1999: 491). Thus, rather than a dichotomy of bonding and bridging, complementarity suggests a blending of diverse social ties within work-based networks.

Podolny and Baron (1997) argue that while considerable attention has been paid to network structures, it is also necessary to examine network content. What is the nature of inter-personal relationships within particular ties? What factors affect why some contacts remain 'weak' while others develop into deeper friendship? For example, dense networks may be constructed around 'interpersonal attraction' (Podolny and Baron 1997: 677). Hence, Podolny and Baron have called for more research on 'the contours and consequences of different types of content that flow through informal social ties' (1997: 690). The reasons behind particular network size and composition are 'still poorly understood' (Roberts et al 2009: 138). As Ibarra and Deshpande observe, there is still insufficient understanding of 'what leads people to form networks with particular characteristics' (2004: 3).

Focusing on migrants, who are often forming networks from scratch, this paper builds on the challenges set out by the above researchers to examine the processes that lead people to form networks with specific characteristics. We consider not only the structure but also the content of these informal social ties. In so doing, we seek to go beyond a simplistic binary between dense bonding networks and expansive weak ties, which risks simplification and reduction in analysis (Patulny and Svendsen 2007). Rather than simply focusing on the structure of informal ties – weak, strong, dense, sparse, etc – we suggest that an examination of the content gives a useful insight into a continuum of dynamic relationships. Drawing on Ryan's (2011) previous work, we suggest that the content of ties needs to be understood not only according to the flow of resources but also the nature of the inter-personal relationships and relative social location of the actors involved.

An understanding of the content, as well as the structure, of social ties helps to illuminate how and why migrants form networks with particular characteristics. Building new

relationships requires opportunities. These processes of network formation do not occur in a vacuum but are situated within specific social structures and locations. As we discuss in this paper, migrants cannot always or easily access networks of their choosing. They may encounter unexpected obstacles. Opportunities to access network may be limited to particular areas of social life.

We suggest that accessing and forming new networks also require shared interests. Relationships may be built around work, common business interests, similar leisure pursuits, shared familial circumstances or living in the same neighbourhood. In exploring the composition of networks, we consider whether and why the actors in these social ties are co-workers, neighbour, co-ethnics, other migrants or local indigenous people.

It has been suggested that a broad focus on networks may overlook the specificities of friendships (Bunnell et al 2011). Because friendships are usually conceived as private, dyadic inter-personal relationships, their social significance may be overlooked by academic researchers (Eve 2002). However, as Eve (2002) notes, friendships are ‘thoroughly social’. Friendships are not simply about relations between just two people; they usually connect overlapping webs of relationships between various actors. Friendships are rarely random but usually link people through shared interests and experiences in particular temporal and spatial contexts (Eve 2002).

Thus, despite the apparent ephemerality of social connections in spaces of flows, it is important to explore how transnational migrants construct friendships in global cities (Kennedy 2005; Beaverstock 2005; Butcher 2009). These interpersonal relationships can make new cities seem more welcoming and hospitable (Gill and Bialski 2011; Thrift 1996). In contexts of change and uncertainty, social ties appear ‘increasingly important in our urbanising, mobile and interconnected world’ (Bunnell et al 2011: 5). We also suggest that networking in such contexts requires particular kinds of inter-personal skills, self confidence and language proficiency (Cox 2000). As Kennedy (2005) argues, highly skilled transnational migrants may initially lack social capital in the destination country, but they can draw upon their high levels of cultural capital to build a range of social ties.

While much of this networking occurs face to face, in particular geographical sites, these highly skilled migrants are also situated in global networks encompassing both virtual communication as well as moments of co-presence. Much of the early celebration of mobility and fluidity so apparent in the transnationalism literature has now been revised and reformulated (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). Assumptions about deterritorialisation and the shift from structure to fluidity have now been moderated to acknowledge that much human activity is still embedded in concrete geographical locations and social structures (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002: 236).

In this paper we suggest that while migrants may be connected to transnational social spaces – such as global financial networks – they are also networking in particular local places such as the offices where they work, the bars where they socialise, the streets where they live as well as the distant place of origin where relative and friends continue to reside. While technology enables global virtual communication, ‘meetingness’ (Urry 2003) remains salient and co-presence is a key part of building and maintaining social ties in various places. Thus, the impact of on-line communication cannot be taken for granted as migrants operate within ‘multiple territorial frames of references’ (Nagel and Staeheli 2010: 266).

In the next section we present a brief summary of our study. We then draw upon our data to explore the opportunities, skills and shared interests involved in making new networks. We then examine some of the challenges or obstacles encountered in creating particular social ties. Then we consider the extent to which our participants rely upon ethnic-specific formal and informal networks in London. Next we discuss transnational links with France and consider the factors that shape why some relationships endure over time while others fade. In the concluding section we consider how our work contributes to understanding why highly skilled migrants form networks with particular characteristics through the process of networking with different people in different places.

## **The study**

There has been little research on the on-going migration of French people to the UK, especially to London (see Favell, 2006). Although there is no single mechanism for the systematic registration of migrants from the old EU nations, census data suggest a significant growth in French migration to the UK. For example, while there were officially 38,000 French people living in the UK in 2001, by 2010 this figure had risen to 111,000 (Office of National Statistics). This corresponds closely to the Eurostat (2009) estimate of 114,000 French nationals resident in the UK. However, these figures are dramatically short of other recent, though unverifiable, estimates. The number of French nationals in London alone has been suggested to be as high as 300,000 (*Mail Online* Jan 24<sup>th</sup> 2010), and based on the French Consulate's estimates, 400,000 (*The Economist* Feb. 24<sup>th</sup> 2011). Data from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) on new national insurance numbers issued to adult overseas nationals in the UK indicates that between 2006/7 and 2009/10, over 80,000 newly-arrived French nationals were allocated national insurance numbers. During 2008-9, only the Poles, Indians and Slovaks were arriving in the UK in larger numbers.

This paper draws upon data derived from an 18-month, ESRC-funded, qualitative research project focussing on the life and work experiences of the French highly skilled in London's financial and business sectors. The project was based on semi-structured, one-off interviews and one focus group. A total of 37 people participated in the study; 16 men and 21 women<sup>i</sup>, most were aged between 35 and 44. The majority had arrived in the UK in the 2000s, though some had been here for considerably longer. 23 were married, 5 co-habiting and 9 single. 25 were parents.

A snowballing technique was used for the recruitment of participants, with purposive sampling adopted as a method for ensuring a sufficient population of selected key demographic categories: gender, age (capturing a life-course spectrum), family status and length of residence in London. The term 'highly skilled' covers a diverse group but the OECD and European Commission/Eurostat framework defines them as those who have *either* successfully completed a tertiary education and/or are employed in occupational roles normally requiring such qualifications. The majority of our participants satisfy this definition on both counts; 29 were qualified to degree level or above, and 16 had pursued subsequent education and training in the UK. Twenty were currently employed in senior positions in, or allied to, the financial sector; 3 worked in the field of finance law; 4 were employed in business-related higher education, whilst the remainder of those in work were occupied in a range of highly skilled professional positions (Ryan and Mulholland, forthcoming).

## **The 'ease' of networking**

In our previous research it has been challenging to get migrants to reflect upon their active networking (Ryan et al 2008). This study was different because participants spoke very openly about their networking strategies. All were conscious of, and reflexive about, the ways they networked in London. One of our first interviewees (Odile) explained in a considered manner how he had developed 'three strategies' for accessing business networks in London. These included a range of formal agencies as well as informal contacts. This level of conscious and deliberate networking reflects the status of these participants as highly skilled migrants in business and financial sectors, where networking is often a key part of their jobs as well as a route to future career mobility. Irene: 'the way to get the clients is to network... that was part of the job, you had to network in the evening or at lunchtime'

Participants described how they actively sought out business contacts: 'I used to just go on the [trading] floor and meet different people who had different roles and then I would invite them to social events that my company would organize' (Signolene).

Because of the shared need to network, London's financial sector provided a structural context in which networking was encouraged and facilitated. As Claire observed, there are 'ample opportunities to network'. These opportunities involved formal corporate events: 'lots of events, conferences, seminars, networking events' (Etienne). As a result, building business contacts was regarded as relatively easy in London:

it's really in the culture here in London where you have loads of events in the evening, you have drinks organized by various organizations, so it's reasonably easy to actually get a network... because it's all being facilitated (Claudine).

In addition to formal events, many participants spoke about the impact of new technology on social networking in London:

Well, now it's much easier than it was before. Now you've got all the internet based, networking websites such as LinkedIn which has over the past two years... made some huge impact in London (Pierre).

As Nagel and Staeheli (2010: 277) suggest, virtual communication is used by migrants to make connections and 'stake a claim' in the host society.

While expanding business contacts was often part of their job, it is apparent that these contacts could also enhance personal career opportunities. In analysing social ties it is important to consider the relative social location of the actors (Lin et al 1981; Ryan 2011). Because of their roles within financial institutions, our participants had opportunities to develop contacts with a range of individuals in senior, managerial positions. The importance of these personal contacts was highlighted by Pierre who had recently been made redundant:

I'm meeting on Wednesday a guy who is heading a department in a UK firm which I got through a French guy and it looks like he likes what I have to say, likes the firm...so we'll have a discussion. So [through] introductions, basically, that's what takes place



Many of these contacts were activated and sustained through socialising outside of work. Several participants described the benefits of socialising in the bars of Canary Wharf after work. Colette commented: 'Canary Wharf is like a little village and you see the same people'. Similarly, Adèle described how 'you go out around the City or Canary Wharf'. As Eve (2002) observes, networks may create specific kinds of ambiances within which particular knowledge is exchanged, information is circulated and specific social practices are shared. Over time this sort of ambience can construct a habitus which becomes so taken for granted as to appear 'natural'. Clearly, the networks developed in Canary Wharf generated this kind of ambience. This informal networking context, as well as the numerous organised networking events, helps to explain why so many participants regarded business networking as 'something that comes naturally' in London (Thierry).

As well as opportunities and shared interests which facilitated business networking, participants also spoke about particular kinds of skills, such as sociability, self confidence and language fluency. Being skilled in the art of networking was foundational to many of our respondents' professional self-definitions. Aurélie simply stated: 'I'm very good at networking. I think a lot of it is about this ability'. Similarly, Irène noted: 'I was lucky to have people-skills which opened the door to me quite quickly in terms of networking'. Valentine, a particularly well connected woman, remarked that her friends jokingly call her 'the Queen of Networking'.

Clearly, business networking is not a new phenomenon but as Wittel notes, in recent years there has been a 'trickling-down effect' from management to shop floor level: 'networking now is as much performed on the ground of the corporate world as at the top' (2001: 56). Wittel adds that now there is also more explicit acknowledgement of the importance of networking and the perception of social contacts as a form of social capital.

Michel explained that these informal conduits of information and advice are essential in the context of so much career mobility: 'In France when you find a job you just stay there for twenty-five years. In England you actually need networking because you can move. The market is more flexible so I think it creates a need for networking'. This point was echoed by Richard who observed that London's financial sector is 'a much more dynamic environment, much more *'go for it'* environment' as a result in contrast to France for example London tends to be 'much more aggressive and much more acquisitive in a way'.

In the fast moving world of finance, access to information is crucial. People who have valuable financial information tend to be perceived as attractive contacts. Richard stated: 'you've got much more access to information, so you're more interesting to people you're talking to'. As noted elsewhere (Ryan 2011), the value of business contacts depends partly on their willingness to share information. Participants highlight the exchange basis of network membership. Their experience of building connections was based on the mutual exchange of information and wider contacts. Charles found that the more contacts he accumulated the more sought after he became: '*Well, Charles knows many people maybe it's good to have him...* People are not stupid, you know. They bring you if you have something to offer, right? If you've just come here to extract everything from them, it doesn't work. It's a give and take game'. Charles' range of contacts may be seen as spanning 'structural holes' (Burt 1998). By linking people from across a wide expanse of financial organisations, Charles has access to varied and rich sources of information which make him a valuable contact in any business network.

The structure of these contacts bears many characteristics of Granovetter's weak ties. These are fairly loose acquaintances: 'you exchange business cards and then keep in touch and you have coffee every now and again' (Colette). However, work-based connections were not necessarily 'weak' ties. As Uzzi (1999: 483) noted, people are more likely to help and support each other if there is a strong bond of trust and loyalty between them. Colette also gave an example of how friendship permeated these business networks. She bumped into a friend in Canary Wharf who said: 'a friend of mine wants some information on what you do on the product that you do. She has an interview but she's not very knowledgeable'. Colette agreed to meet the person and explained: 'right, this is how you need to prepare your interview'. Although Colette and the woman she helped did not previously know each other, and may be seen as forming a weak tie, their meeting was facilitated by two dyadic friendships. Colette agreed to help this unknown woman through loyalty to her friend. Colette's friend was the key linchpin and as such may be seen as bridging a structural hole (Burt 1998). This example illustrates how weak ties may involve connections through friendship. Thus, rather than being entirely distinct, weak and strong ties may coincide within 'network complementarity' (Uzzi 1999).

Working relations can also be sources of friendship, companionship and mutual support (Ibarra and Deshpande 2004). Several participants noted that their work-based contacts had become friends. Claudine observed: 'a lot of the time you may not end up making friends with them but a lot of the friends I've got here in London actually I've made through work'. Similarly, Bertrand remarked: 'I made a lot of friends at work.' On what basis did friendships emerge? In the next section we explore which factors facilitated but also hindered the development of close, deep, interpersonal relations.

### **Encountering barriers and limits**

While all of our participants were successful at networking in the business environment these relationships did not necessarily translate into intimate friendships. Making new friendship networks required opportunity and shared interests as well as socio-linguistic skills and confidence. There was a notable trend in our data that work colleagues were more likely to become close friends if they were also migrants. As Samson noted:

when you are working with foreign people, they don't have a lot of roots here, so they are quite welcoming and quite interested to meet other people...most of the people I work with just love to have people round and we just love to invite them

Bernadette observed: 'it is very easy with international people to meet up and to have a relationship'. These migrant work colleagues shared a common interest in befriending each other because they did not have roots or family networks around them. As Kennedy argues, strong bonds of friendship, defined by 'reciprocity and closeness' (2005: 188) can be: 'reinforced by... contingencies arising from the possibly unique nature of transnational experiences among professionals' (2005: 190). Their migratory experiences proved a common motivation for making new friends including 'a shared sense of relative exclusion from the host society' (Kennedy 2005: 190).

In contrast to the ease of business networking, many participants commented on the time and effort required to build meaningful friendship. Etienne noted that in order to progress a

‘deep’ friendship ‘you have to work hard to try to develop something interesting more than just the basic, not superficial’. Several others remarked: ‘it is very difficult’ and ‘it takes time to make friends, to get to know new people’ (Damien); ‘It’s very difficult actually’ (Signolene); ‘it’s very difficult to make friends in London’ (Irene). Despite their busy working lives, newly arrived highly skilled migrants may initially encounter loneliness and isolation outside of the working environment, particularly at weekends (Shortland 2011). Sylvie noted: ‘I found it very lonely at first.’

In particular, many participants highlighted the challenge of forming new friendships with English work colleagues. Several participants referred to the ‘superficiality’ of work-based social ties. Irene commented that ‘I think the English can be very superficial’. She added that despite the pub-based sociality and acquisitive business networking ‘they were colleagues, they were not friends’. This remark was echoed by Odile: ‘people are also very superficial... you meet somebody in the pub, you have a good evening but then the following day it is gone’. Although, as noted earlier, Charles has been very successful at developing expansive social contacts across financial circles, he contrasted these business relationships with friendship. Although he expected to make friends through his ‘networking at the workplace’ this has not happened. ‘I had very good relations with people that never became friends’. He noted that the ‘pro-active’ directness which served him well in business networking did not seem to be transferable into friendship networks: ‘there is a limit’ and if you ‘push too much in England, you will reach that limit’ (Charles).

Hence, while some work-based networks may be also sources of friendship and support, we cannot assume that social actors will derive all their needs from just one set of relationships (Roberts et al 2009). As Wellman (1984) found, many social ties are ‘specialised’ and tend to provide particular support. He concluded that actors need to shop at ‘different boutiques’ to find specialist sources of support rather than a ‘one-stop shop’ providing everything in one, multiplex tie (Wellman 1984).

The factors which facilitated access to business contacts – structural opportunities, shared interests and skills – did not necessarily translate to making friends with business colleagues, especially with English people. English people were regarded as polite; sociable in the pub, but with an almost invisible barrier to further sociability. As Charles noted, after work ‘these English’ get on the train to their suburban home, a line is drawn which a foreigner cannot cross. For our French participants, being invited into someone’s home for dinner was a sign of friendship. Bernadette remarked: ‘it took me a very long time to be invited to a British house’. For Florin this was associated with national characteristics; the English are ‘reserved’. Agnès joked that English people may be intimidated to invite French people to their homes for dinner, ‘because French people have this image of gastronomy’.

Many participants explained that English people were reluctant to invest in friendships with migrants because of their apparent transience. For example, Etienne commented that people may not ‘want to create something deep with someone when they are going to leave within two years’. As other researchers have noted, migrants who are perceived as temporary and transient are regarded as not worth the effort of getting to know (Kennedy 2008). This experience is not unique to London but is encountered by migrants in many other societies including France (Scott 2006).

This discussion reveals the relevance of the temporal and spatial in enduring friendships (Bunnell et al 2011). As Damien noted, English people regularly socialised with close friends established over many years, often going back to school or university. Thus, they were not looking to add new people to their networks. This suggests that contrary to Sennett's (1998) views about the prevalence of short-term connections, deep and meaningful friendships, supported through regular contact, may continue to endure over many years.

Nonetheless, some of our participants had made English friends and noted the specific opportunities and shared interest that had facilitated such friendship making. Interestingly, many of these friendships had been formed not through work but in the context of sporting clubs and leisure pursuits. Étienne had made lots of friends through a football club. Valentine made friends through an operatic group. Céline spoke about the local squash club:

I didn't have a network of friends at all, not at all, but I used to play squash for Surrey so through the squash network then yes, I had quite a lot of friends locally.

Spatial connections as well as shared interests were highly significant in friendship making. Elizabeth lived in a suburb with many English neighbours. When she had her first child and joined the local National Childbirth Trust (NCT) she made several English friends. She commented upon: 'the life changing experience of having children if you live in a local area. I must say that probably my best friends now, my closest friends, are from the NCT network'. As Wellman notes: 'network analysis suggests that the structural location of persons in systems of production and reproduction' strongly shapes the kinds of 'community networks in which they are located' (1984:5). For migrant women in particular, systems of reproduction associated with nursery, play groups, schools can facilitate access to new, local neighbourhood networks (Ryan 2007).

Thus, making new friends, especially outside the workplace, is associated with shared interests and experiences; having children, pursuing sports or hobbies. These shared interests were usually associated with specific places and group activities. Joining a group activity, such a sporting club or a parenting group, may enable migrants to become part of locally embedded friendship networks.

Given the challenges of making friends with English people, in the next section we consider the ways in which French connections in London may be utilised for networking purposes.

### **French Connections in London**

Some participants attended French events and frequented associations like the French Institute. Others were involved in formal networking organisations like the French Chamber of Commerce and the Young French Chamber: 'The most obvious one for me was the French Chamber of Commerce... that opened quite a lot of doors' (Irene).

The French organisation mentioned by most participants was the *Lycée Français*. While involvement in French schools was often driven by family needs and social connections, there were opportunities for some business networking. Odile made several business connections through his links with other French parents at the Lycée.

when you go to the French lycée, you have a lot of people working in the business and finance environments...the relationships would develop with friends and my children's friends. It was a great way of developing a network (Odile).

This raises questions about the extent to which these highly skilled migrants relied upon ethnic specific organisations. Within the literature much has been written about the importance of ethnic specific networking among migrants, including the role of migrant associations (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). It may be assumed that migrants need the culturally sensitive support and practical assistance of ethnic specific services. However, while many participants enjoyed the opportunity to go to a French film at the Institute, or attend a reception at the French Consulate, the nature of their economic activity was much more expansive and required links with a wide range of people beyond the 'ethnic enclave' (Anthias 2007). French ties were often discussed in relation to friendship networks outside of the working environment.

Several participants had constructed largely French friendship networks in London. Pierre and his wife had made many French friends through the church. As practising Catholics they were active in the local French church and 'met lots of very interesting people and...15 years afterwards, it still is the main source of networking' in London (Pierre).

As noted elsewhere (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Ryan 2011) shared ethnicity may not be a sufficient basis for creating and maintaining bonding networks. Indeed, several participants actually sought to avoid becoming part of the French scene in London. Adèle said seeking out French people in London 'is not my cup of tea'. Like many other participants she commented that she had not come to London just to socialise with French people. Similarly, Luc observed: 'I refuse to stay only in the French crowd in London because I think when you move to a new country you don't have to stay only with the ex-pat crowd'.

Within the literature it has been suggested that migrants may gravitate towards the familiarity of co-ethnics during the early phase of migration, but later begin to make more ethnically diverse friends (Gill and Bialski 2011; Kennedy 2008). However, within our research we found that an initial search for diverse friendship groups, including English people, was followed by a sense of frustration and disappointment at the failure to access English friendship networks: 'I wanted to come here to mix with English people and I found it was a bit difficult really ...so I was a bit disappointed' (Damien). There then followed a gradual decision to relax back into the familiarity of French connections. Valentine remarked: 'In the beginning I really wanted to be in an English environment so I wasn't going out and looking for the French...[But]...over the years I have been socialising more with French people than English'.

However, overall, it would appear that shared interests, life experiences, opportunities to access local group activities, rather than merely shared ethnicity are likely to form the basis of new friendship bonds post-migration. This challenges any simplistic assumption that migrants necessarily seek out ethnic enclaves. So far we have focused on local networks within the specific places where people live and work in London. We now consider the extent and ways in which people were actively maintaining transnational networks.

## **Transnational Networks**

Due to the nature of their jobs most participants had global networks: 'the banks... they've got presence everywhere in the world...the team is not just the team in London, the team is European or worldwide' (Celine). New technology enables these professionals to maintain such dispersed connections. Through Facebook, Colette maintains links with a 'web of people' working in investment banking throughout the world. These contacts could provide useful information about transnational job opportunities. As Urry argues: 'Social life is full of multiple and extended connections often across long distances, organised through certain nodes or hubs within which social life is formed and reformed' (2003: 157).

However, the possibilities afforded by new technologies tell us little about how people actually use these to access and maintain long distance relationships (Eve 2008; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). While many participants used on-line networking, these tools were usually used in combination with physical meetings (see also Hall 2011). The need for meeting up was eloquently expressed by Florin:

I still have some teams working in Paris for me; a team here, a team in Paris, a team in Spain, so people everywhere. The biggest team is in Paris and then afterwards it's London so you need to go to Paris to have meetings. Talking over the phone is fine...but at the end meeting people, having lunch, it's important to keep contact, to make sure people are happy or not happy. Over the phone it's not always easy to do that (Florin).

As Urry has argued: 'as the world financial system is disembedded from specific places, so the traders require ever richer face to face relationships in order to exchange appropriate information, knowledge and especially trust... re-embedded meeting-places are necessary for trustful relationships' (2003: 167). Thus, rather than being seen as two separate forms of networking, on-line and face-to-face communication often work together, the one reinforcing the other (Urry 2002; Hall 2011). This pattern is also discernible in transnational kinship.

Most participants devoted considerable effort to maintaining strong, transnational links with family in France; involving a blend of face to face meetings and virtual communication (Ryan and Mulholland forthcoming). Weekly and even daily phone calls were not uncommon. Luc said: 'I talk to my mum every day... and my sister at least once a week'. Maintaining family ties required time and effort. The nature of these long distance relationships frequently involved aspects of caring, including emotional and practical support. For example, when Chantal's child was critically ill she went back to France to receive support from her parents. Similarly, when Renée became ill in London she returned to France to be looked after by her mother.

All our participants visited France regularly. Although none was a weekly commuter, most travelled to France several times per year. Adèle was fairly typical: 'For holidays about three or four times a year. And then I might pop down two weekends. So six or seven times a year'. For most people physical proximity was a huge advantage of living in London. This desired proximity to France may shape future migration plans; deterring relocations to more far flung destinations (Ryan and Mulholland forthcoming). As Claudine observed: 'it's reasonably easy to maintain contact... France being so close...it's not like its Australia or anything'. The speed and convenience of the Eurostar was appreciated by most: 'it takes

two hours and 15 minutes on the Eurostar... it almost feels like the same country really' (Bertrand).

Rather than new technology replacing regular visits, our participants tended to combine telecommunication and physical co-presence. Étienne said: 'you've got the telephone and internet thing and people visiting you and you visiting them back'. Similarly, Claudine described her ties with people in France: 'you've got all the modern tech like Skype and all that which makes it really easy to keep up with people, and I go to France regularly'.

Although most participants invested time and effort in maintaining kinship networks in France, other relationships were less enduring through prolonged separation. Luc spoke for many when he noted that 'you tend to lose a bit of contact with friends'. While some researchers have pointed to the endurance of migrants' friendship networks back home (Conradson and Latham 2005), our data suggest that spatially dispersed friendships may weaken over time. Sylvie noted that 'I see much less of my French friends than I used to'. In addition, maintaining friendships also required specific efforts to keep in touch with a range of separate individuals. Maintaining disparate, dyadic ties may require more effort than interconnected, multiplex kinship ties. Sylvie explained that when it comes to friendship back in France: 'you have to make a conscious effort to reactivate it'.

Despite the many opportunities to maintain contact through new technological communication, friendships tended to fade due to a lack of shared interests. Several people observed that they now had less in common with old friends in France, their lives were different and it was harder to find things to share:

when you start to be living in a different country for a very long time, you create your own world and you feel that there is a gap between you and your past friends and you don't really share exactly the same experiences... so you can't really share everything (Bernadette).

Renée, who had only been in London for 3 years also remarked that her friends back in rural south of France did not understand her London lifestyle. She felt a growing gulf between them: 'maybe just two or three friends are aware that I'm a manager now, for they don't want you to say *'I'm a manager wow, it's good wow'*. I'm afraid of what people are going to think'.

As argued elsewhere (Wimmer and Glick Schiller; Ryan 2011) transnational networks cannot be simply taken for granted. Long distance relationships require on-going nurturing and commitment of time and energy. In order to appreciate the dynamics of these networks, it is necessary to focus on the content of inter-personal relationships. Our findings support Eve's (2008) and Roberts et al (2009) observation that kinship ties may endure because of multiple connections bound by various inter-dependencies and obligations including practical and emotional caring. Dyadic ties to particular friends may weaken as people have less in common and less interest in working to sustain the tie. Thus, despite advances in telecommunication, the widening gulf with friends in France was linked to a lack of shared interests or life experiences making transnational friendships more difficult to maintain over time.

## **Conclusion**

A social networks analysis provides a useful tool ‘for those macroscopic studies which currently leave interpersonal relations out and those interpersonal analyses which assume that relationships operate in a social structural vacuum’ (Wellman 1984: 44). The application of classic social network concepts to the net-working of highly skilled French migrants reveals opportunities but also constraints in accessing and maintaining social ties. Our discussion has implications beyond this French case study and suggests how migrant social networking may be studied and understood. There is still insufficient understanding of why people form networks of particular characteristics (Ibarra and Deshpande 2004; Roberts et al 2009). This paper has sought to address that point by revealing not only the opportunities, shared interests and socio-cultural skills which facilitate networking but also factors that may inhibit access to and maintenance of diverse social ties.

Utilising the framework suggested elsewhere by Ryan (2011), we contend that social networks need to be understood not only through the various resources available via social ties, but also the nature of the relationship between actors and their relative social location. Within the dynamic and acquisitive environment of London’s financial and business sectors, relationships tend to be based on shared interests in exchanging information between colleagues and business contacts. There are numerous opportunities, both formal and informal, to meet like minded people with the common goal of developing business relationships. The structural context facilitates and indeed requires on-going network formation. Drawing on classic theorists such as Granovetter and Burt, we have shown how these networks play a role in career escalation in the highly competitive world of finance. The more information and social contacts one accumulates, the more valuable one becomes as a business contact. However, there are also expectations of reciprocity and trust. Business networks are not simply webs of weak ties motivated by instrumentalism, but also include strong ties based on friendship, loyalty and mutual support (Podolny and Baron 1997). Thus, rather than a simple dichotomy of bonding versus bridging, it may be more helpful to think about a range of mixed and dynamic connections, a sort of ‘network complementarity’ (Uzzi 1999).

Our findings complicate the sequential model of networking which is often apparent in migration studies (Ryan et al 2008; 2011). Rather than starting with tight, ethnic specific bonding networks and then later beginning to build more expansive bridges, our participants indicate more complex and diverse patterns of networking.

All our participants had large networks. However, as noted by Roberts et al (2009), the significant time and effort required to build large numbers of contacts, may detract from the energy needed to develop or maintain close emotional relationships. Thus, it is necessary to strike a balance between continually accumulating new contacts and taking the time to sustain mutually supportive relations. Our findings illustrate that this is a two way process, migrants must commit to forming new social ties but this commitment needs to be reciprocated by other social actors. Hence, the process whereby some business contacts become friends while others remain ‘superficial’ reveals some of the opportunities but also obstacles experienced by migrants.

Our work draws on Wellman’s analysis to highlight the salience of mutual understanding and common experiences in facilitating access to new friendship networks. As Ibarra and Deshpande (2004) similarly show, networks both reflect and reinforce social identity.



Investing in local networks with non-migrants may indicate an intention to put down roots and negotiate belonging at a local level. However, by contrast, encountering obstacles to local non-migrant friendship networks may reflect but also reinforce a sense of unbelonging and result in more attachments with co-ethnics.

This discussion of local ties raises questions about global connections. As actors in global financial markets all our participants had various connections across the world. These involved combinations of virtual and physical, face to face, encounters, underlying the interplay of new technology and physical co-presence. Our findings support Eve's (2008) observation that the opportunity for virtual communication does not necessarily mean that long distance relationships will be sustained over time. Many friendships faded as shared interests dwindle. This finding has implications for how transnationalism has been understood as a given outcome of new technology (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). Our data highlight not only opportunity but also the importance of shared interests and incentives for maintaining long distance ties over time.

By focusing on the content, the relationships within social ties, our paper proposes a continuum of dynamic connections. We have shown how migrants access and maintain a plethora of social ties; from the strictly business relationship, to workplace friends, to local friendships with club mates, parenting groups, extended and spatially dispersed kinship ties. These connections are dynamic over time through changing professional, social and familial circumstances. A business contact may become a friend, while a childhood friendship back home begins to fade over time.

Our research points to some of the factors, including structural, technological but also interpersonal, that facilitate or obstruct network formation and maintenance both temporally and spatially. Our participants were networking on various levels and on several scales simultaneously – fulfilling different needs and accessing different resources, e.g. business information through work colleagues, mutual caring through kinship bonds in France but also the companionship of new friendships in London. All types of networking require time and effort and cannot be taken for granted. Networking relies upon a mix of opportunities and shared interests as well as particular levels of skill and self confidence. Despite the fluidity of business links, in a fast moving global economy, the intimacy of long distance family ties, but also localised friendship remains important even for highly skilled migrants.

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<sup>i</sup> There was gender parity among the interviewees, but the focus group was largely female, hence the gender skew among overall participants.